

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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SAVED FROM THE FLAMES OR NICK CARTER IN MYSTIC VALE CREMATORY



BY THE AUTHOR OF NICK CARTER

POISED UPON THE BRINK OF THE ROOF WAS THE FORM OF NICK CARTER AND HIS ANTAGONIST.

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SAVED FROM THE FLAMES;

OR,

Nick Carter at Mystic Vale Crematory.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

NICK CARTER'S SHREWD TRICK.

On a wintry day in January, about three o'clock, P.M., Nick Carter, in disguise, stood in the chapel of a curious-looking, one-story stone building, surrounded by a dozen or more sad relatives of a man whose body was about to be cremated at the Mystic Vale Crematory in New York.

They had gathered to witness the last sad rites, and from the big chimney, which rose above the roof, a thin wreath of vapor-like smoke curled upward, denoting that the process of heating the great retort had already begun.

Nick Carter had often intended to witness the entire process of cremation, but up to this time he had never been present when the work was begun.

Everything was as quiet as an ordinary churchyard burial, and except for a somber inscription upon the chapel wall, one would

have scarcely realized that but a few feet of masonry alone separated the room from a retort where the excessive heat would completely consume a human body in sixty minutes.

Yet such was the case, and it was to witness the process and to otherwise study the methods employed in thus disposing of the dead, that had prompted the detective to come to Mystic Vale.

Presently a door opened and an attendant appeared, who quietly invited the little assembly to enter an adjoining room, from which a view of the interior of the retort could be had.

The detective joined the party and stepped into the observation room.

Half a dozen little circular peepholes were arranged along the side of the retort, and through these narrow openings a good view of the interior could be obtained.

Nick secured a convenient place of ob-

servation and peered into the roaring furnace of flame, which filled the interior of the retort with a glowing, milk-white heat.

For a moment only was this scene continued, when the flames were suddenly extinguished, and only a dim, ghostly light pervaded the place as preparations were being made for introducing the body.

The huge shutters at one end of the retort were opened, and the body, placed upon a movable catafalque and completely covered with a shroud, was moved forward into the furnace by the attendants in charge.

Then the shutters were closed and the heat was once more applied.

Two powerful jets of gas, meeting in the dome of the retort, ignited, and in a blinding, dazzling sheet of flame, swept across the space immediately above the body.

Striking the opposite side of the retort, and whirling back across the floor beneath and around the structure upon which the body lay, it completely enveloped the corpse in its winding sheet of flame, and submitted it to the double action of the fire.

Nick could scarcely suppress a shudder, so vivid and striking was the picture.

In a single hour nothing but a handful of ashes would remain of what had once been a man.

"Science is indeed making wonderful strides in thus performing in an hour what nature requires years to do," mused Nick.

But the scene presented two ideas to the detective—one of which was to be practically demonstrated before he left the building.

The process of cremation presented an opportunity for a murderer to effectually cover every trace of his crime, if he would run the serious chance of detection. Once inside that retort and every evidence would be effectually destroyed.

Thus, if a man had been poisoned and the

remains consumed by that fire, every trace of the crime would be forever lost.

"I am going to know what papers are required in order to get a body cremated," thought Nick, and he approached an attendant with the request to be shown the vaults and preparing room.

The detective was quickly ushered into the room where the bodies are prepared for the furnace.

"Here the dead are removed from the caskets," said the man who accompanied Nick. "The corpse is placed upon a bench having a metal plate for the remains to rest upon, then a shroud is saturated with alum water and placed over the body as you see here," and the attendant turned and pointed to a side of the room where the metal catafalque stood ready for the retort, bearing upon its surface the form of one who had been prepared for the consuming fire.

Mystic Vale Crematory has two retorts, and the body which awaited cremation was intended for the second furnace.

But the devouring flames were for once to be cheated of their prey.

Nick Carter's wonderful sagacity was destined to play an important part in that strange tragedy.

"We are very busy just now," replied the attendant to a question from Nick. "There are three men conducting the work, and the retorts are both running nearly all the time."

"I suppose every suspicion of foul play must be removed before a body can be accepted for cremation?" spoke the detective.

"Certainly. The medical certificates and undertaker's permit do that, for without these papers a corpse cannot be accepted," was the reply.

Nick took the papers in his hand and carefully examined them.

Suddenly his keen, gray eyes kindled with a strange light as he turned and spoke.

"Is that the body of the young man mentioned in these documents?" he asked.

"It is," was the quick reply.

"May I see it?"

"Certainly."

The attendant stepped to the low bench-like structure upon which the body lay.

He carefully turned back the shroud and exposed a light wire frame which held the cloth free from the body.

"You see," spoke the attendant, by way of explanation, "when the intense heat of the furnace strikes that shroud the alum oxydizes and the covering retains its shape throughout the entire process, thus shutting out from the spectator's eyes the action of the flames upon the body."

Nick plainly heard the words of the speaker, but for the moment his attention was riveted upon the face of the body.

The light from a big gas burner overhead fell squarely upon the outstretched form, and Nick Carter started slightly as he beheld the pale, upturned face of a young man of perhaps two and twenty.

Ringlets of light, curling hair clustered about the high, intellectual forehead, and the thin lips were slightly parted, revealing a double row of pearly teeth.

"This is the body of Allen Doyle?" asked Nick, as he again referred to the papers.

"It is," was the attendant's quick reply, and he bent a glance of curiosity upon the great detective. "Did you know him?"

"I did not know that he was dead," was Nick's evasive reply. "When was the body brought here?"

"About noon to-day."

"The undertaker turned in these papers, did he?" asked the detective, referring to the certificate of death and the permission for cremation from the Board of Health.

"Yes, why? Are they not all right?"

"Evidently so; else they would not have

been accepted. The body came in a casket, of course?"

"Yes, that one," designating a plain, inexpensive burial case which was in one corner of the room, close beside the door which led to the storage vaults.

"What do you do with the ashes after the body is cremated?"

"We place them in an urn and keep them until the relatives call for them," was the reply.

"And the casket—what do you do with that?"

"Usually the undertaker in charge attends to that matter."

"Who came with the body of young Doyle besides the undertaker?" was the Little Giant's next inquiry.

"No one except his attendant."

At that moment the speaker was called into the other retort room, and Nick Carter was left alone with the dead.

"Allen Doyle," mused the detective, as he glanced once more at the certificate which he still held in his hand. "I will stake my reputation that these papers are forged."

"He turned once more to the body and carefully removed the sheet above the subject's face.

For a moment the detective stood and gazed at the silent form of the seemingly lifeless man, apparently deciding upon some plan of action.

Then he turned and glanced toward the door. The attendant was still in the opposite room with his associates.

"There is foul play here," muttered Nick. "I can easily circumvent the plotters, and I will do it."

With sudden resolution, he carefully turned back the alum-saturated sheet, and quickly raised the inanimate form from the bench and bore it swiftly across the room.

With one hand he lifted the cover from

the casket, and gently raising his burden, he deposited it inside the box, letting the lid fall noiselessly into place.

Quickly returning to the metal frame upon which the body had lain, Nick drew the sheet back into place and carefully arranged it as it had been before.

To all appearances the shroud had not been disturbed, but the detective was not a moment too soon. He had scarcely completed his task when the three men who were conducting the work entered.

Everything was in readiness for placing the body within the retort, and one of the attendants quickly threw open the ponderous shutters, while the remaining two pushed the catafalque and its empty shroud forward into the retort.

In an instant it was over. The great door swung into place again, the valves were opened to their fullest extent, the flames roared fiercely through the great furnace, and the attendants turned away, wholly unconscious of the deception which Nick Carter had practiced upon them.

CHAPTER II.

RESURRECTED BY ELECTRICITY.

Half an hour later the famous detective's assistant stepped from the train at Mystic Vale and cast a swift glance about him.

Presently his eyes rested upon an undertaker's horse and wagon which stood upon the opposite side of the street, and he started forward as he saw the familiar form of his chief upon the seat.

"What is up, Nick?" he asked as he reached the detective's side. "I knew by your message that you were in a hurry for me, and I made pretty good time in getting here."

"So you did; but this is a case of hurry, for I have made a little discovery at the crematory, and I want to get a body away

from there before any one knows that it has not been consumed in the retort. I think there is some crime on foot, and if the crematory people do not know that the body is not consumed, they certainly cannot say anything that might put the culprits upon their guard."

"Tell me about it, Nick. What aroused your suspicions?"

"I found a young fellow all ready for the retort, and I am satisfied that the papers under which they received him are forged. According to these papers, his name was Allen Doyle, and the instant that I saw him I made up my mind that he was not dead."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Chick. "Where is the body now?"

"Still at the crematory, where we are going," and as he spoke Nick urged the horse into a brisk trot, and in a moment they were rattling over the road toward the crematory where the body of Allen Doyle awaited the detective's return.

For several moments Nick Carter's mind was busy revolving the circumstances surrounding the case, and then he spoke.

"The handwriting upon the certificate was all by one man," he said. "We shall find later on that the victim's real name is not Allen Doyle."

"Then the crematory people were deceived by a clever forgery?"

"Yes, Chick, and they are as yet entirely ignorant of that fact. The body is now in the casket just as it was brought to the building, and the attendants are not aware that it has not been consumed by the flames," and then the Little Giant related the story of his discovery and the deception which he had practiced upon the men in charge, whereby the victim of a murderous plot had been saved from a horrible fate.

"We will go directly into the building and remove the casket and its contents,"

said Nick. "Then we will drive directly to Dr. Reid's and get the old specialist interested in the case."

"Evidently you do not expect the plotters to return for the casket, then?"

"No, Chick. The person who arranged this plot is far too shrewd to give himself away by ever returning for that casket. He will never even come back for the ashes of the dead, which I fear will not be very considerable in this case."

"Then our first task will be to get the body to a place of safety, and then find the undertaker's carriage which brought the casket to the crematory."

"Precisely; although I have already found the wagon that was used by the would-be murderer."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; you are riding in it."

Chick looked quickly at his chief, but he saw that Nick was in dead earnest.

"Then you are already on the high road to success," he remarked.

"Possibly; nevertheless, the man who owns this rig is as much in the dark as any one."

"How so?"

"He never heard of the matter until I looked him up and informed him. He did not even know that the horse and wagon had been out of the stable."

"Then it was 'borrowed' by the plotter for the occasion?"

"Exactly. Two men came to the stable with an order for the undertaker's horse and wagon. While neither of the men was known to the stable keeper, yet they appeared so business-like that he thought nothing of it, as the undertaker often sent for his rig by strangers.

"This simple point would seem to indicate that whoever took that forged order to the livery-stable for Undertaker Johnston's

team was acquainted with the fact that he was accustomed to entrust his business to others. This plainly settles the matter that there were two men in the deal, at least—the head that originated the plot and forged the papers, and his subordinate, who was posted on the matter of the team.

"Doubtless they were both well disguised, but notwithstanding that fact, I guess that one of them can be easily identified."

"Then you have a clew to work upon?" asked Chick.

"Yes; so far as identifying the man who drove the body to the crematory is concerned. When the stableman led the undertaker's horse from the stall, it sprang at this man and seized him by the right arm, shaking him as a dog would a cat.

"The beast had never shown any signs of being vicious before, but it appeared to hate this man from the moment that it first set eyes upon him."

"That would plainly show that the horse had seen the man before?" thoughtfully replied Chick. "Perhaps the fellow had been once in Undertaker Johnson's employ."

"Possibly. At any event, it strengthens my original theory that the man was not a stranger. That horse left the prints of his teeth upon the man's arm, and the mark will remain for days, so that, once found, he can be easily identified."

Nick and his assistant had now reached the crematory.

Hitching the horse, they entered the building.

"We have come for the casket in which Allen Doyle's body was sent here to-day," spoke Nick Carter.

The attendant closely regarded the speaker.

"You are not the man who brought it," he said.

Naturally enough, he failed to recognize Nick in the new disguise which he wore.

"No; the horse bit him, and he was not able to attend to it," was the Little Giant's quick reply.

The answer seemed to allay the other's suspicions, and he turned and entered the preparing room, closely followed by Nick Carter and his assistant.

The casket lay exactly as Nick had left it, and lifting the box with apparent carelessness, the two detectives quickly conveyed their burden to the carriage, and a moment later the unsuspecting attendant saw them drive swiftly away.

The Little Giant realized that no time was to be spared in getting medical aid, for he had only had an opportunity to note, on making the discovery, that the man was still alive; but whether his state of unconsciousness was the result of poison, or some other cause, he could not tell.

Fortunately, it was but a short drive to the residence of a physician whom Nick knew to be one of the most skilled practitioners in the city, and a man who had made a life study of poisons and their effects, and he hastened to the old doctor's home.

They found him in his office, and the expert specialist greeted Nick Carter with a hearty grasp of the hand.

"What is in the wind now, Carter?" he asked, as he saw the undertaker's carriage at the door.

Nick quickly told him that he had a critical case in hand which demanded immediate attention, and the two detectives carried the body into the house and laid it upon the table in the physician's consulting-room.

After a careful and thorough examination of the silent form, the old doctor turned to Nick and exclaimed:

"Mr. Carter, this man is hypnotized."

"Ah, then, it is not poison?" eagerly exclaimed the detective. "Is he in imminent danger?"

"Not necessarily," was the reply; "but the person whose mind controls his should be found as soon as possible, for there is but the faintest sign of life in his body. The strain is liable to prove fatal, because the action of the lungs has been almost entirely suppressed.

"You can see by the faint crimson tinge in the lobes of the ears that there is a very slight action of the heart; but it is very slight indeed. Who is responsible for his present state?"

"That's what I intend to find out," answered Nick, and he then related the principal facts to the startled physician.

"But for your timely discovery, then," spoke Dr. Reid, "that unfortunate would have, ere this, been completely incinerated?"

"Yes, and the world might have remained ingorant of the crime," was the grim reply.

Then Nick told the physician about the man who had been bitten at the stable, but before he had entirely finished, the doctor interrupted him excitedly.

"Why, he must have been the identical man who came here about one o'clock with his arm in a very painful condition from the bite of a horse. It was swollen to nearly twice its natural size, and the man was suffering intensely. Was he rather a short, thickset man, who stammered slightly?"

"The man whom I want is short and dark," replied Nick. "He wore a checkered suit, a light gray overcoat, and a soft felt hat."

Nick made a mental comment of the fact that the doctor had mentioned that the man stammered slightly.

"That describes the fellow to a T!" exclaimed Dr. Reid. "He came with a man who waited in the carriage while I attended to the wound."

"Then you did not recognize either of the parties?" asked Nick.

"No; but evidently the man in the carriage knew of me, for he told his companion to come to me with his wound, and besides, they had one of Blanchard's stable rigs, so I suppose he was some one who lives near.

"The horse that they had was a dark bay, and the carriage was a Goddard buggy, with a caught top. Doubtless you can find out more about them at the stable."

But Nick had already made a sign to his assistant, who immediately left the doctor's office and hastened away in the direction of Blanchard's big livery stable, which was but a few blocks away.

Dr. Reid turned once more to his patient, who still lay like one dead.

To all appearances, the man was not breathing, and Nick could not distinguish the faintest flutter of the heart as he pressed his hand against the victim's breast.

The body was perfectly rigid, yet it did not feel cold and death-like to the touch of the expert physician.

It was these striking symptoms which Nick's alert eye had caught at the crematory.

Ever watchful, keen, active and with his senses about him, the shrewd detective had instantly discovered the signs of suppressed animation which the less observing attendants had entirely failed to note, and it was due to the combination of chance and Nick Carter's remarkable sagacity, that the young man was rescued at the last moment from a horrible fate.

"Only a skilled physician who had made a study of such cases would think him still alive," said the old doctor. "In my years of experience I never saw a subject so completely under the hypnotic trance as he is. The man who holds him subservient to his

will is capable of showing great power in this way. I feel positive that it is a man."

"I agree with you, and he must be found. You cannot restore him without the aid of the master mind which controls him?"

"I may possibly be able to restore the action of the heart, Mr. Carter. I shall apply an electric current to the body, but I can't restore the man's senses, for they are as if absent from the body."

"You can keep him alive until this man is found?"

"I can; by the use of artificial stimulant and nourishment, if need be, but, Mr. Carter, find your party as soon as possible."

Those last words were spoken in a tone which Nick knew had a very serious meaning, and as the physician came from an inner room bearing in his hand a medical battery, Nick promised that the poor fellow's life should be saved.

"I feel sure of it, my friend," was the quiet reply, as the doctor knelt by his patient's side, and carefully applied the electrodes of his battery to the man's arms and chest.

With skill and care he noted the result, and presently Nick saw him start.

"Please hand me that mirror," he said, pointing to a small handglass upon the table.

Nick complied with the request, and Dr. Reid was considerably relieved to note the result, as he placed the glass to his patient's lips.

"Can you hear me?" suddenly shouted the physician in his patient's ear, and the answer came like a voice from one dead, and caused, even to the Little Giant a new sensation, accustomed though he was to uncanny sights and sounds.

"Yes," came the reply, in a deep, sepulchral whisper, "I am Allen Doyle, and I am dead!"

CHAPTER III.

"IN ONE HOUR, NICK CARTER, HE WILL BE A RAVING MANIAC."

So quickly and with so little apparent effort had the change from seeming death to life been made, that Nick could but admire the superior skill of the scientist.

But the almost mechanical answer which had escaped the victim's lips plainly served to show how strong the unknown hypnotist's power still was over the man.

Dr. Reid once more applied the electric current to the sufferer's body, and it was perfectly evident that the action of the heart and lungs was quite restored, when, ten minutes later, he rose from beside the sofa upon which the body lay.

"You must spare no effort to find the person who controls his mind," said the old physician. "This man is not strong enough to stand the extraordinary strain for any great length of time."

"I shall do the best I can to find him," was the quiet reply, and just at that moment Chick returned from his tour of investigation.

"You found the rig?" asked Nick, as he saw his assistant's expression of satisfaction.

"Yes. That horse and buggy were out of the stable about three hours. It was hired by a man who lives on Fifty-eighth street, just west of Sixth Avenue. He has twice before had a team at Blanchard's stable, and once the hostler drove around to the door for him."

"And the man who was bitten—what of him?"

"He did not show up at the stable, and the report is that no such party has ever been there."

"We will take that statement with a grain of allowance. If I don't lose my guess, the chap who was bitten by Undertaker Johnson's horse can be best found at Blanchard's

stable. Where does this man live on Fifty-eighth street? What is the number?"

"I don't know yet, but I found out, without much trouble, that there is a granite horse block at the curb before the door, with a plate set into the face of the stone bearing the name 'Babson.'"

"Very good. You take the undertaker's horse and wagon back to the stable, then look up the Fifty-eighth street house. If you don't find me near there inquire for a note for you at the drug store at Fifty-eighth street and Sixth Avenue."

In a moment the young detective was gone.

Turning to the doctor, Nick saw that he was still busily engaged over the body of the hypnotic, who still lay like one dead, except that there was a perceptible action of the breast, showing that the man was breathing.

The detective instructed the doctor to spare no effort nor expense in attempting to restore the man, and then he, too, left the house.

It did not take him long to reach Sixth Avenue, and presently he entered the corner drug store.

"Did you know young Mr. Babson?" he asked of the clerk in charge.

"You mean Walter Babson, who lived here on Fifty-eighth street? I should say so, and a fine fellow, too—buried to-day, you know."

"Too bad, wasn't it? He was a fine chap, indeed. Pretty wealthy, wasn't he?"

"I suppose he was well fixed. The old gentleman died about a year ago and left him and his sister about a million in cold cash."

"Whew! Was it so much? I knew he was well fixed, but did not imagine that the figure was so high. They were the only heirs, I believe?"

"Oh, no. Although he is in no need of their wealth, yet they have an uncle, Mr. Hosmer Babson, who has been living in their home for nearly a year, I should think, and they tell me that he is even better off than were either of his brother's children. He is a retired Australian gold miner, I believe. At all events, he seems to be a very quiet sort of a man; always well stocked with money, and puts out but little."

Nick realized that he had struck a bonanza. Here was one of the very class of men whose superabundance of knowledge is more often turned to the harm than benefit of his neighbors, and yet the detective resolved to pump him dry.

"Miss Babson will get about all of the property now, I suppose."

"Yes; a fine snap for some bright young blood who wants to marry well," was the reply, and Nick could not help mentally observing that he doubted the drug clerks especial qualifications as regards brilliancy.

After casually perusing the city directory for a few moments, the detective left the shop.

"That was a good lift," he thought. "Now, Mr. Hosmer Babson, to look you up a bit, and then to get at the bottom facts of his case."

Nick strolled along Fifty-eighth street and covertly surveyed the Babson mansion from the opposite side.

"I think I will inquire into your gold mining interests a trifle by and by, but first I will call upon your niece."

Five minutes later he appeared as a well-dressed elderly gentleman and walked up the steps of the Babson residence.

A heavy knot of crape was hanging to the door, and a strong pull at the bell was responded to by a heavy set woman of middle age.

"Is Mr. Walter Babson in?" asked the

caller, in a low tone, and his glance shifted from the woman's face to the black drappings upon the knob.

The woman bent her penetrating gaze squarely upon the speaker, and, in a significant tone, replied:

"Mr. Babson is dead."

"But I mean Mr. Walter Babson, the young man," was the quick reply, as though the man mistook her meaning as referring to the elder Babson, who had died a year previous.

"But he is dead, sir," persisted the woman. "He died on Monday and was buried at Lynngrove Cemetery to-day."

"You don't mean to say that Walter Babson is dead?" cried Nick, in a well-feigned tone of surprise.

"I do, sir."

"Then I am too late—too late! But"—suddenly checking himself in his well-simulated grief—"perhaps I could see Miss Babson?"

"Then you are the gentleman whom Miss Babson was expecting to call?" quickly asked the woman, and she instantly stepped to one side and opened the door as if to admit the caller.

"Yes," answered Nick, thinking that the easiest and most natural reply that he could make under the circumstances.

"Will you come in a moment?" asked the servant. "I have something to tell you which, if you knew Miss Babson, will pain you."

"Indeed! What is that?" and the disguised detective quickly stepped into the house.

His conductor showed him to the reception-room, and invited him to be seated.

Nick, however, did not accept the invitation, but remained standing near the door, closely regarding the woman as she approached the spot where he stood.

"Miss Babson became violently insane over her brother's sad death, and they had to take her to a hospital immediately after the funeral," she said, in a tone of sadness.

"Who attended to that matter?" quickly asked Nick.

"Her uncle."

"What doctor did he have?"

"A specialist whom I do not know, and then, to-day, a council was held, and it was decided that the only safe course was to take Miss Lillie to a hospital, where she could have better treatment."

A suspicion, which had already entered Nick's mind, was increased as he listened to the words of the woman.

Was it not probable that the disposal of Miss Babson was but a second step in the dark plot to remove every obstacle which interfered with a clear title to the property included in the will?

Who, in such a case, would be the party most directly interested?

With the thought, Nick turned to the woman.

"Is Mr. Babson in?" he asked.

"If you will wait here a moment, I will see if he has returned," was the reply.

The woman left the room.

"Here is a plot that will require some careful work to fathom," mused Nick. "Is that woman interested in it, or is she innocent of every thought of a crime?"

"The expression in her eyes betrays hidden emotion which may be ascribed to either of two reasons—it may be due entirely to the death of the young man and the excitement attending the funeral as well as to the events which have followed it, or it may be that the woman herself is at the bottom of the whole affair."

Nick could find no immediate solution to the query, but it remained for him to discover later that he had met a woman of

greater cunning than any of her particular class who had ever before confronted him.

Presently she returned with the information that Mr. Babson was not back yet from his trip to the hospital, where he had gone to attend to the removal of the insane niece.

"May I ask to what hospital she was taken?" inquired Nick.

"I do not know. Mr. Babson attended to that matter, and he can inform you when he returns."

"But I do not feel that I can wait long for him. When were the symptoms of insanity first discovered in the young lady?"

"Not long before her brother died," was the somewhat indefinite reply.

"Was she taken violently insane at the start?"

"No. At first the doctor pronounced it hysteria, but later the symptoms became so much more violent that it was plain to be seen that she was in a very bad way."

"This is, indeed, sad. Did the physician think hers an incurable case?"

"I think the impression is that he did regard it so. Mr. Babson told me that he feared it was doubtful if she would ever recover. I was very busy with the affairs of the house, and of course I could not learn the precise facts, but I do hope that she will soon be herself again, for she is one of the sweetest girls in the country, and I am completely unnerved by the sad affair."

Indeed, the woman's appearance did not belie her words.

Her face was drawn and haggard; dark circles showed beneath her eyes, and her cheeks were sunken and pale, plainly showing that some grave matter was preying upon her mind.

While the woman was absent from the room the detective had been scrutinizing the numerous portraits which adorned the walls.

Directly opposite where he stood were the

likenesses of a gentleman and lady of perhaps twenty-five years of age, and Nick had twice glanced in their direction while the servant had been speaking.

Evidently she noted his look of inquiry, for her eyes suddenly dilated.

"Since you are an intimate friend of the family, I presume you recognize the portrait of Mr. Babson?"

Her gaze sought the face upon the opposite wall as she spoke, and Nick turned again to look at the picture.

Drawing a pair of spectacles from his pocket, the detective adjusted them to his nose as one who was near-sighted, and then he stepped across the room toward the pictures in question.

There was something in the woman's voice which had commanded Nick's attention.

Did she suspect that he was other than he appeared? Had she put this question in order to test his genuineness?

These questions filled his mind as he crossed the carpeted floor and paused before the two gilt-framed portraits.

"I did not know Walter Babson's father and mother at the time these pictures were made," he said, a moment later.

He saw her start, and a slight flush of surprise spread over the woman's face as she instantly replied:

"Indeed! I fancied that you did."

It was perfectly plain that Nick had hit the nail upon the head this time, for he had recognized the fact that the portraits were much older than they looked from the opposite side of the room, and furthermore, he had discovered the artist's name in the lower corner, and he knew that the man whose name appeared there had been a well-known New York portrait painter, but that he had been dead ten years; thus he realized that the pictures were not those of young Babson and his sister.

But, judging from her reply, Nick fancied that they might be the likenesses of the parents.

He was playing a careful game whereby he hoped to get a look at the faces of Walter and his insane sister:

"I do not think that there was a striking resemblance between Walter and his father at that age," remarked Nick a moment later, as he cast a sweeping glance about the room as if to note the presence of the young man's picture.

"Well, perhaps not. Walter never had a portrait of himself, although his sister had often urged him to sit for one. Somehow, he never seemed to get ready to attend to it."

"It is surprising how many people neglect this matter, and like him, for instance, pass away without leaving as much as a decent photograph for their sorrowing relatives to look at."

"That is true, indeed, in his case," hastily replied the woman. "Walter and Miss Babson had spoken of that matter quite often, but somehow they never got around to have the work done. He is dead and she in an asylum, and all the likenesses that either of them left are two little things in a locket which Walter gave his sister some two years ago."

"Well, possibly they are good enough so that they could be enlarged and copied," suggested Nick.

"Yes, but I never thought them very good. I have no doubt, however, that Mr. Babson will have them copied if the work can be successfully done. Do you know about such work?"

"Well, I have had some experience," was the detective's quiet reply, and at the same time he felt a thrill of satisfaction.

Was he likely to get a look at the pictures after all?"

"I do not pretend to be thoroughly posted in such matters, but if the likenesses are fairly good, with the modern improved photographic apparatus, I have no doubt the work could be successfully done."

"I will show you the pictures, that you may judge," said the woman, and she left the room in quest of the locket.

A few seconds only elapsed ere she returned, bearing in her hand a beautiful, diamond-studded gold locket, to which was attached a long, finely-wrought neck chain.

The woman was trying to open the little case as she crossed the floor toward Nick, but somehow she could not seem to find the spring which held it closed.

As the detective took it in his hand, he saw that the letters "L. E. B." were engraved upon the case in monogram, and he fancied that these were the initials of the young woman's name.

A little screw projected slightly from the edge of the case near the stem, and Nick pressed it slightly, at the same time raising his eyes to note the presence of the woman.

He saw that she had stepped back to a considerable distance from the spot; and instantly a suspicion of danger flashed over him.

He made a quick movement to grasp the locket, but too late.

Snap!

The spring was released like a flash, and the hinged case flew backward with sudden force.

A coiled spring within the locket was liberated, and instantly the detective's head and the upper portion of his body was completely enveloped in a smoke-like cloud of bluish-white powder, which the released spring had forced into the air about him.

Like lightning, Nick Carter sprang backward, thus hoping to avoid the deadly poison, but the very air seemed filled with

the noxious drug, choking, blinding and suffocating him.

He could not breathe. The air was stifling, and his nostrils, eyes and ears were completely filled with the noisome dust.

He endeavored to cry out, but his lips and tongue were instantly parched with the strange substance, and like lead he dropped to the floor.

The horrible truth flashed upon him, and he realized that he had been duped.

He felt a dizzy, whirling sensation, and then a sudden faintness nearly overcame him.

But he would not yield.

With a gasp, he staggered to his feet.

His eyes were blurred.

He could scarcely distinguish an object within the room.

Once more he tried to shout, then he started toward a window, groping with outstretched arms, like one who is walking in the dark.

Then there came a strange, benumbed sensation of his brain, and an intense, overwhelming drowsiness to which one less strong than the Little Giant would have succumbed.

But, no! Nick Carter resolved not to yield.

He stumbled, reeled, plunged forward, and would have struck the floor but for the heavy table which arrested his fall.

Recovering his balance, he staggered toward a door.

His imperfect vision was suddenly clouded by the sight of a man.

Certainly this must be his would-be destroyer—the wretch who had so craftily plotted to kill him.

A mighty resolution seized Nick.

He would at least kill his enemy, and perhaps the sound of a pistol shot would reach

the ears of Chick outside. Surely Chick must have returned by this time.

He fumbled for his revolver, but, as he drew it from his pocket, he realized that he was sinking.

Down, down he felt himself dropping, and then he raised his weapon in an unsteady manner and sought to cover the grinning fiend who bent above him as he seemed to be slipping into an unknown depth.

Then he felt himself plunging forward into space, and, still grasping his useless weapon in his hand, he pitched headlong to the floor, helpless, unconscious, insensible—a victim of the deadly powder which he had struggled so valiantly to overcome.

“That settles Nick Carter forever!” exclaimed a powerful, heavily-built man, as he stepped into the room and bent above the great detective’s motionless form.

“In one hour he will be a raving maniac!”

The woman, who, up to this time, had been a silent spectator of the tragedy, now stepped forward and confronted the speaker.

“How in the world did you know it was Nick Carter?” she asked. “I fancied that every clew had been completely covered.”

“And so did I, but Hudson was in Blanchard’s stable at the time of the detective’s call to inquire about the horse and carriage that we had this noon when we took the girl away, and I was thus informed to be on the lookout for this chap. Now he is solid enough, I guess.”

“What will you do with him?”

“Put him in the sub-cellar until it is dark, and then take him to where she is.”

“You think he would be safe there?”

“I do. Any man, woman or child who can get out of there without help is welcome to his liberty. It is the very worst place in all Long Island for a poor devil to get into.”

“Well, what do you suppose put him onto the track, anyhow?”

The woman’s voice was filled with a troubled tone, and her anxiety was apparent lest the detective knew more than they suspected.

“Oh, I presume the confounded girl did communicate with him in some way. That was a happy thought of yours to spring the locket racket on him just as you did. It worked just as well with him as it did on the girl.”

“Yes; but I thought that he would get away once.”

“No fear of that. I had another dose of the powder ready to dash into his face, if I had seen that he was likely to get away. Now take up every trace of that powder, but mind you—do not get it into your nostrils,” and leaving the woman to do his bidding, the murderous wretch lifted Nick’s unresisting form from the floor and bore it away toward the basement of the house.

He was gone for a considerable length of time, but when he did return, there was a malicious gleam of satisfaction in his eyes as he exclaimed:

“If the accursed detective gets out of that fix I hope that I may die of my own drugs!”

CHAPTER IV.

CHICK COMES TO NICK’S RESCUE.

Chick left the undertaker’s rig at the stable and returned directly to Sixth Avenue and Fifty-eighth street.

It was within five minutes of the time that Nick Carter sank to the floor insensible, under the effects of that powerful drug, that his faithful assistant was inquiring for the note which Nick had promised to leave with the drug clerk if he had gone from the house.

“That settles the matter,” thought the young detective, as he stood for a minute upon the corner and glanced toward the Babson residence. “Nick is still in that house,

and it is my business to learn if he wants anything of me. I will just walk past the house and signal him, as it is about time for him to be showing up unless he has struck something pretty solid to work upon."

Chick strolled along Fifty-eighth street by the house.

To all appearances he was now a swell sport out for a short constitutional, and as he passed the building he carefully surveyed the windows for some sign of his chief, whom he might expect to signal him first, if he was anywhere in sight.

But there was not the faintest sign of life in the building, so Chick resolved not to wait longer. He returned underneath the windows, whistling an air familiar to his chief.

Twice or three times he repeated the little signal, but without the effect that he had hoped for.

The young detective crossed over to the opposite side of the street, and although not appearing to do so, he scanned every window thoroughly, as he once more passed the house.

He had hardly reached the corner when a shade was quickly drawn and a curtain flashed back from a window upon the first floor.

Then the lower sash was thrown up with sudden impulse, and at the same time Chick caught the momentary glimpse of a hand.

But that it was not the hand of his chief he was absolutely positive.

The slim, tapering fingers were plainly those of a woman.

What was the meaning of this? Was Nick within that room?

Certainly the act betrayed haste upon the part of the woman who had raised the sash, and it was perfectly evident that something unusual was transpiring—something which called for more light and fresh air.

He coupled this very significant fact with the failure to get a reply from Nick, and his conclusion was formed.

"I am going into that building. Nick is in danger," he muttered, "or I would have received a reply to my signal. Here goes."

He entered a narrow areaway which communicated with the basement.

Here he made a quick change in his disguise, for he felt that he must be prepared to meet any one who might chance to confront him, although he little realized what a murderous plot had just been enacted to get Nick forever out of the way.

Chick listened for some sound, but none came to his ears.

A second window had, however, been opened beside that which had attracted his attention while upon the street.

The woman who had presented Nick that fatal locket was now busily engaged in removing every trace of the poisonous powder from the articles of furniture in the front room, and she apparently gave little thought to the possibility of being discovered in the act.

Chick mounted a flight of stairs which communicated with the first floor of the mansion, and when he had reached the landing he paused and listened.

Still he could hear no sound, and he cautiously advanced to a door which stood slightly ajar.

The door opened into a side hall, and as no one was in sight, the young detective resolved to pass through to the front of the house.

It took him but a moment to reach the library door, which, like that through which he had just passed, stood ajar.

Once in the library, he could plainly hear the sound of some one moving about in the reception-room beyond, and as silently as a shadow he crossed the floor, until he stood

by the door which opened into the front room.

A space of about three inches gave him a good opportunity to see the interior of that room, and he started with a puzzled look, as he saw the housekeeper with her head completely muffled in a heavy veil, carefully wiping the dust from the furniture.

The woman presented a strange sight indeed, and for several seconds Chick watched her cautious movements.

What did it mean?

Every article of furniture was more or less covered with that mysterious powder, and the manner in which she removed it showed very plainly that she felt a dread of touching it.

Was the substance some kind of a poison which had been used upon Nick?

The thought came to the detective's mind, and he gripped the door casing with a determination to ascertain if such was indeed the case.

"There is something that is not just right, anyhow," thought Chick.

"If I am not mistaken, something important has taken place here, and I have serious work before me."

A few seconds later Chick was cautiously ascending the stairs to the upper floor of the house.

At the first landing he paused and listened.

He fancied that he heard the sound of footsteps near at hand, and as he strained his ears to catch the faintest sound, a door was opened and closed with apparent haste, and he felt that he was in danger of being discovered.

Some one was approaching the stairs, and he knew that if he would escape detection he must act quickly.

At the foot of the stairs there was a narrow alcove in the wall, and there a coat rack afforded an excellent place of concealment.

Chick took advantage of this, and from his hiding-place he saw a man descend the stairs and pass along the hall to the door of the reception-room.

He cautiously opened the door, and spoke to the woman inside.

"How are you progressing?" he asked.

The answer came in a muffled tone, as the woman spoke from behind the heavy veil which she wore:

"I will have it all removed soon. Are you going out?"

"Yes, but I will not be gone long. If any one calls do not admit him, for I think it would be best to keep the house closed for the present."

"Shall you notify them directly?"

"Yes, and until everything is fixed up it will be best to see that no one is admitted to the house."

Chick started, for the words might imply that his suspicions were true, and that his chief was a prisoner within the building; perhaps that Nick had been poisoned, and these people were plotting to convey his body to the crematory.

A moment later the man turned and passed from the hall to the street.

The detective heard him descending the steps, and he was not long in making a careful but thorough search of the upper part of the house.

One of the chambers was locked with a Yale lock, but this was no obstacle to the progress of Chick's search, for the strange little picklock performed its work here as well as in other places, and presently he stood in a room that was fitted up as a sort of laboratory.

The walls of the room were adorned with several glass-covered cases which contained vials and tiny boxes that looked decidedly suspicious.

Many books were lying upon the tables

and shelves, and these, Chick saw at a glance, treated of poisons and their effects, and among them were a number of volumes which dealt with animal magnetism and hypnotism.

He was evidently in the den of the vile plotter who had sought to take the life of the young man whom Nick had discovered at the crematory.

A little desk stood at one side of the room, and a pen lay near at hand, on which the ink was still fresh. Evidently it had just been used, and as Chick stood examining it, his glance took in the almost spotless blotter which lay across the desk.

With an exclamation of surprise, he bent over the blotter.

The outline of a sentence was quite plainly traced there, as though the writer had been in a great hurry after he had penned the words, and Chick quickly took a little mirror from the table, and held it so that he could read the reflection of the characters in the glass, then he saw the words which sent a thrill through his body:

"Safe till you come."

And a little lower, upon the sheet, were these final words of a message:

"In the sub-cellar."

"So the villain has written a telegram for some one, and gone out to send it. I must find my way to the sub-cellar at once."

Chick succeeded in silently making his entrance to the cellar, and from this to the sub-cellar underneath it, where it was so dark he could distinguish nothing.

Taking his bull's-eye from his pocket, Chick was about to press the spring, when he heard a sound made by the sudden rush of a body toward him.

He darted back, and a second later he saw a man spring through the open doorway into the main cellar.

One glance told him that the man was

Nick Carter, but that there was something unusual in the expression of his face.

In his uplifted hands the Little Giant grasped a heavy rod of iron—the bar with which the sub-cellar door had been fastened. As he moved slowly and with great caution toward Chick, his eyes gleamed with the light of madness, and it was plain that in the uncertain light he failed to recognize his faithful assistant.

Chick had retreated to a corner of the cellar, where he stood with his back against the wall.

A garden hose was hanging by his side upon a peg, and with one glance the young detective saw that it was attached to the water pipe near at hand. It was all ready for immediate use.

He grasped the hose from the peg and turned it directly toward his chief.

Another second and he had opened the stop cock, and the well-directed stream went hissing through the nozzle, striking Nick squarely between the eyes in its course.

With a gasp, Nick threw up his hands and fell backward to the floor of the cellar, and in an instant Chick was upon him.

He wrenched the iron bar from his chief's hands, and grasped Nick firmly by the shoulder, when the Little Giant suddenly raised his eyes, and Chick saw that there was the returning light of recognition in their depths. The shock from the deluge of water had partially restored the detective's reason.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE RIGHT TRAIL AT LAST.

Upon coming to this decision, Chick quickly assisted his somewhat bewildered chief to rise.

The Little Giant cast a glance about him, and then he turned to Chick, somewhat bewildered.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"In the cellar of the Babson house," was the quick reply.

"Ah, yes! I remember," exclaimed Nick, at the same time passing his hand over his head in a dazed sort of way. "The locket and the powder. But tell me how and where you found me?"

Chick briefly related the facts of his discovery to his superior.

"I thought you would do me sure," remarked Chick, as he told of the exciting incident which had resulted in Nick's restoration. "I don't know what in the world caused me to turn the hose on you, but I knew that it was time for me to do something, and I hardly knew what else to do. I could hardly make a fight, and besides, I had to make as little noise as possible, so as not to alarm the people in the house."

"And you did just right, Chick. That water was just the thing—in fact, the only thing which would restore me. I was poisoned by a powder called 'talavachi,' which is prepared by the Indians of México, and which destroys the reason within a few days, unless by a liberal application of water upon the victim, when the effect of the drug is destroyed."

"Who poisoned you, Nick?"

"The villain that we are after," was the quick reply.

"Then you know the man who tried to murder young Doyle?"

"Yes; we are on the right trail. I shall be all right presently," as he saw the anxious look upon Chick's face. "I shall come out of this whole—thanks to your prompt action—but I was pretty much out of my head when you opened that door, and I fancied that you were another of the gang."

"It was almost a miracle that I discovered you, anyhow," answered the young detec-

tive. "Had I not been thoroughly satisfied that you were under this roof, I hardly think I should have found my way down here."

"Well, we have some difficult work ahead of us, Chick, and we want to go right ahead with it. This man represents an awful power, both in the use of drugs and in his control over mind and matter."

"I made a little discovery when I went back with Undertaker Johnson's rig," replied Chick. "He once had a man in his employ by the name of Hudson, whom he discharged about a year ago because he would persist in getting full and abusing his horse. He was a short, dark, thick-set man and he stammered slightly."

"Without doubt he is the man who drove the undertaker's horse to-day, and when we find him we will also find upon his arm the prints of that horse's teeth. I tell you a dumb beast rarely forgets an enemy."

"This man is probably a hanger-on about Blanchard's stable?"

"Yes. I believe that he piped you off when you were there this afternoon, and came directly here and gave the alarm, which accounts for the attempt upon my life. It is surely Walter Babson who lies in Dr. Reid's office under the mystic spell of a hypnotic power, and furthermore we will find his unfortunate sister in a madhouse, the victim of the same Mexican poison which so nearly finished me."

"Then she is not in the plot?"

"Not at all. There is only one solution to this case. This man who is known as Hosmer Babson, and who represents himself to be the brother of Walter Babson's dead father, is a deep villain—a criminal and murderer of the most skillful type."

A moment elapsed, in which the twain listened intently to discover if they could detect the sounds of anybody stirring in the rooms above, and then Nick continued:

"I am told that Walter Babson was buried in Lynngrove Cemetery to-day. I want you, Chick, to find out if such is the case, and if so, I want you to get a permit to dig up that casket and see just what it contains."

"And do you think that I will find the young man's body?" asked Chick, with a significant smile. "Walter Babson cannot well be in two places at one time, and I believe it is your opinion that he is in Dr. Reid's office at this moment."

"The proof that the body is not in the casket will be strong evidence indeed that such is the case. I am going to Blanchard's stable and look up this man, Hudson. You will return from the cemetery and report your success as soon as you find that there is nothing but rocks in the casket at Lynngrove."

"I will find you at the house?"

"Yes, or at least you may come to the house."

"Now to get out of the house and leave the premises without the knowledge of our quarry," and Chick quietly led the way to the side door through which he had entered.

"Would it do to pull in the woman now?" asked Chick, after they were well outside.

The Little Giant shook his head.

"We may want to make her useful to us, and she must remain in perfect ignorance of our escape for the time being. The moment that we are sure that Allen Doyle is really Walter Babson, we will be ready to round up the gang in short order."

Nick and his assistant left the house unobserved, and a few moments later they were at the Buckingham on Sixth Avenue, where Nick telephoned to the superintendent of Lynngrove Cemetery as follows:

"Look up your records of burial and tell me if there was a body received there to-day from New York for interment, under the name of Walter Babson."

Presently the reply came back that the

young man's body had been duly received and properly buried.

This was sufficient. Nick thanked the official and rejoined his assistant.

Chick bade his chief good-by and set out for Brooklyn, while the Little Giant went straight to Blanchard's stable in search of the man who had been bitten by Undertaker Johnson's horse.

An hour later Chick had reached the cemetery and the shades of night were rapidly falling as he approached the office of the superintendent of burials.

"I am here to make a little investigation with your permission."

"Ah! you are the party who telephoned to me concerning that matter, some time ago?" responded the superintendent.

"An hour ago—from New York."

"Precisely."

Chick handed the official his card.

"I think there is something very peculiar about this matter, because some one else also made inquiry less than half an hour ago about this same burial," said the official, as he glanced at Chick's card. "Is there something wrong about it?"

"Perhaps. That is just what I came here to ascertain."

"Have you any suspicions that a crime has been committed?" asked the superintendent in an anxious tone.

It was plainly evident that the man had a horror of the possibilities of associating Lynngrove Cemetery with any shadow of a crime.

"I do not know, Mr. Spencer, but there seems to be something irregular in relation to the death and burial of this young man, and I would like to have a quiet investigation made."

"Can it not be done without the matter becoming generally known to the public?" quickly asked the official.

"I want to exhume that casket——"

"What!" exclaimed the superintendent. "Then it must be made known to the authorities!"

"But farther than that it is not necessary to publish the facts. If I find what I suspect, there will be but little that you need have cause to fear."

"What do you suspect—that the man was murdered?"

"Oh, no. I do not even think that he is dead."

"Can you mean that he was buried alive? We have the certificates of death and the burial permit!" gasped the astonished official.

"Never mind that," replied Chick. "What we want to do is to exhume that casket as soon as possible."

"Not to-night!"

"Right away. At once."

The superintendent hesitated for a moment.

"I will be responsible for all damages, Mr. Spencer. Take your sexton and open that grave. If you find a body in the casket we will attend to the permits afterward."

"But that is expressly against the law."

"Except in cases where the law directs, and in this case I represent the law," was the calm rejoinder.

"Very well," reluctantly answered the superintendent, as he turned away. "I will do as you direct, sir."

Five minutes later Chick and the official were on their way to the little plot of ground which represented the Babson burial plot in Lynngrove.

A sexton accompanied them with spade and pick.

"Who telephoned to you after you got my message?" asked Chick, as the trio passed among the numerous headstones toward the newly-made grave which they sought.

"I don't know. No name was given, but inquiry was made as to whether or not any one had inquired about the burial, and of course I answered in the affirmative, not knowing of any reason to the contrary."

They soon reached the spot where the freshly disturbed earth showed that a burial had recently taken place. The superintendent directed his sexton to get to work at once, and uncover the casket.

Chick examined the granite shaft which stood in the center of the little lot, and saw upon it the name of Walter Babson's father and mother, who had died but a year previous.

"This is certainly the right spot," he thought, and he set to work to assist the laborer in removing the soil from the grave.

The rest was easy. In a short time the box was reached, the catches which held the lid in place were released, and when the sexton raised the top and exposed the interior of the burial case, the superintendent seized Chick's arm in a firm grasp, and pointed to the empty casket.

"It is as you said," he barely articulated. "The body is gone."

The scene was indeed an uncanny one, as the trio stood there about that open grave, their only light a single oil lantern, which shed but a feeble glow about them.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SCENE AT THE MAD-HOUSE.

"What did you find, Chick?" asked his chief.

"A sheet of lead in the bottom of the casket which, I think, would weigh about one hundred and fifty pounds."

"Then we are, indeed, getting at the facts, my boy. If that man was not buried in Lynngrove, I guess we know what became of him."

"Indeed, it has seem that we are getting

at the bottom of the case," came the young detective's quiet reply.

"I found the man, Hudson, Chick."

"He is the man who was bitten by the horse?"

"Exactly."

"Then he is also a pal of the chief villain in the play?"

"Precisely, and that chief villain is the pseudo Hosmer Babson—retired gold miner, and all-around crook and murderer."

"How do you know already that he is a crook?" asked Chick, unable longer to conceal his curiosity as he saw the gleam of satisfaction which filled the eyes of his chief.

"I can even tell you more than that, Chick. He is an escaped convict."

"No!"

"Yes. He has the regular prison chain step, and although he tried hard to conceal the fact, and at times he was very successful, yet he would occasionally drop into that peculiar, shuffling left step—the mark which brands an old convict for life."

"Where is Hudson now?"

"In the lock-up at headquarters."

"What next?"

"We must find the girl and capture this wretch who represents himself as Hosmer Babson."

"Where is the girl?"

"At a private mad-house away out on Long Island."

"Ah! Then you know the place?"

"I do, and it is one of the worst in the country to-day. It will be no cinch to rescue Lillian Babson from the grasp of those fiends and restore her to health and sanity. We will start to-night, for time may be precious to the young woman in this case."

Half an hour later two men passed through the East Thirty-fourth street ferry-house and boarded the boat for the depot of the Long Island Railroad upon the opposite shore.

The trip across the river was uneventful, and the two disguised detectives reached the depot of the Long Island road just in season to catch an outgoing train.

As they took a seat in the car, Nick made a sign to his assistant, which the other was not slow to comprehend.

A man had entered the car and taken a seat just ahead of them.

"What do you make of him?" asked Chick, a few moments later, after he had carefully studied this individual.

"He is suspicious that he is being watched, and I think you will find that he has recently been in communication with the very man that we most want."

"Possibly he is the keeper of the mad-house," suggested Chick, and instantly Nick bowed in affirmation of his theory.

"I do not doubt it in the least," was the reply. "You might have noticed when he entered the car that he cast a swift glance up and down either side of the aisle. That glance told me as plainly as words that the man fancied that he might be followed."

"Sure," said Chick.

"You say that the superintendent told you that some one had telephoned to him and asked if any inquiry had been made concerning the burial of that empty casket, and I have no doubt that this man, who calls himself Hosmer Babson, telephoned to his ally here to come in to the city and remove me from that sub-cellar to his mad-house. Doubtless they made the discovery that I had escaped. Now he is on his way back, and the plotters have discovered that an investigation is on foot, so that he naturally feels somewhat nervous."

The train was now on its way to the east, and Nick and Chick settled to a careful hypothesis of the case.

"So far, the evidence that we have got supports our original theory," said Nick.

"If nothing happens we will prove whether we were right or wrong before the sun rises again."

"And provided that we are right——"

"The proofs will be forthcoming, for I have cabled to Sydney, Australia, to get some clew to this man whom we know only as Babson."

"You suspect that he can be traced by a description?"

"He will doubtless prove to be the murderer of the very man whom he is attempting to personate."

Chick started, for now he fancied he saw through the entire plot.

Hosmer Babson had been killed, and the man who now appeared as the uncle of Walter Babson and his unfortunate sister was, indeed, an escaped criminal, for without the knowledge that they had had an uncle in the wilds of Australia, the Babson children would scarcely have welcomed this stranger to their home.

Here was the sequel to the entire story, which could not well be unraveled until the missing Walter Babson was found and proven to be none other than Allen Doyle, or poor Lillian Babson was restored from her awful prison chamber within the walls of a mad-house.

But Nick Carter was upon the trail, and the sufferings of the unfortunate young woman were not destined to be of long duration.

"How did you get into the good graces of this fellow at Blanchard's livery stable?" asked Chick, as the train sped along the north shore.

"That was easy. You told me that Undertaker Johnson turned the fellow off because he would persist in drinking, and I knew that if he was suffering intense pain with that arm he would naturally be indulging in his old habit, and so when I entered the

stable, about the first man that I set eyes upon was a chap who answered the description of Hudson to perfection, except that he had been recently shaved and had his hair closely trimmed.

"As I was passing the spot where he stood, I slipped upon a spot where water had frozen upon the floor, and my hand struck his arm, when he turned upon me with a savage oath, and cringed with pain as he raised his hand to the spot that I had touched. I knew that I had found my man—but, of course, I said that it was an accident. Then I gradually came around to the point that I had at first planned to work, and when I asked him to join me in a drink, he quickly complied.

"We were soon on the very best of terms, and although the fellow was shy of any questions pertaining to this matter, yet I pumped him in such an off-hand way that he did not suspect a thing until I sprung the final surprise upon him."

"You feared if you let him go again he would skip?"

"Yes; but he's safe now."

During the following hour the two detectives kept a close watch upon their suspect, and when they were approaching the next station Nick pinched his companion sharply, although to all appearances the Little Giant was busily engaged in looking out of the car window.

Chick caught the glance of his chief, and he noted the look of suspicion which appeared upon the face of the man who was apparently planning to leave the train.

"He is our man," spoke Nick, under his breath, and in a moment the train was drawing into the station.

But when their quarry looked around again Nick Carter and his assistant had disappeared as suddenly as though the earth had swallowed them up.

A moment later the man stepped cautiously from the train, and cast swift, searching glances up and down the station platform.

But three or four passengers were seen to alight, and apparently he was at a loss to know the meaning of the sudden disappearance of Nick Carter and his assistant.

A horse and a covered wagon were standing alongside the platform, and the man advanced to the side of the vehicle, and addressed the party upon the seat.

"Is that you, Nat?" he asked.

"Yes," came the gruff answer. "Where's your load?"

"Didn't bring it," was the instantaneous reply. "Say, did you see two chaps get off here, who slid out of sight before the train fairly stopped?"

"No, I didn't. Who were they?" came the answer.

"I'm not sure, but we want to be getting out of this locality in short order, for if I am not mistaken, they were Nick Carter and his assistant, in disguise."

"What!" and with the startled exclamation, the driver sprang erect. "Are those devils onto you?"

"Oh, don't be frightened, Nat," replied the suspect, in a reassuring tone. "They have no evidence, even if they are, for we have only done our duty——"

"But I am not going to get into any trouble," persisted the startled attendant. "If Nick Carter is onto you, you may as well make up your mind that he has got good reasons for it——"

"Don't be a fool!" exclaimed the irate principal. "You had better spend the time that you are wasting here chinning in getting a mile of road behind you," and the man sprang to the seat beside his subordinate and hastily grasped the reins from the driver's hands.

"I wonder where those two fellows went," he mused, as they spun over the road at a merry clip. "It doesn't seem to me that they could have remained upon the train, and if they got off, they were onto me."

The driver heard, but did not answer.

He was sitting gloomily in his corner of the seat, and apparently brooding over the situation.

Presently he spoke.

"I say, is the detective onto the girl racket?" he asked.

"Sh! What is the use in talking so loud? You don't know who may be along here by the side of the road," exclaimed the cautious individual, and without vouchsafing any reply to his companion's query, he whipped up the horse, and soon they were fairly flying over the road toward the high bluffs, where was located the prison-like mad-house in which Lillian Babson was supposed to be confined.

"I don't know exactly what to do about the girl," spoke the asylum keeper, when half the distance to the spot had been covered. "I don't dare to trust her to the old woman, for if Nick Carter should take it into his head to try and get her out, she would be no match for him."

"That's right. You ought to have a good, likely man to stand guard over her all the time—a fellow who wouldn't hesitate to shoot if it was necessary."

"Who would I get?"

"That is the question, but perhaps you could find some one in the city."

"Ha! I have it! The very man!" exclaimed the wretch, in an exultant tone. "Hudson, the fellow who brought her here, you know?"

"Yes, I know," came the quick reply.

"But what about to-night? If Nick Carter was on the train, as you thought, he will be on hand before you can get Hudson here."

"You and I will attend to that to-night, and if the accursed detective shows up and goes to meddling with my affairs, he may as well prepare for a funeral," and with a savage cut of his whip, the speaker urged his horse forward at a furious pace, as though to escape the danger from behind.

They reached the gloomy buildings which comprised the home of the asylum-keeper and the little prison-like stone building which rose upon the very brink of a giant bluff, that overlooked Long Island Sound—a veritable fortress in itself.

Surely there was no escape from that gloomy pile of masonry except by outside aid.

The twain quickly unhitched the horse, and as the asylum-keeper led the beast away to the stable, his companion removed a blanket and halter from the vehicle.

To a close observer it might have appeared that he was a long time in finding the blanket—in fact, one listening close by the side of the carriage might have overheard a hasty, whispered conversation within the vehicle, but presently the driver appeared and hastened away to the stable, and closely following him, a dark shadow crept from the carriage, and disappeared in the direction of the high cliffs which lay just beneath the walls of the dark and gloomy prison-house.

The asylum-keeper did not discover the shrewd deception that was being practiced upon him, and he little knew that the man who had acted as his driver from the depot was none other than the prince of American detectives, Nick Carter, in the disguise of "Nat," the wretch's trusted ally.

The doctor and Nick entered the building, and, after some discussion, it was decided that Nick should spend the first hours of the night keeping a careful watch for the appearance of any one about the premises.

This was just as the Little Giant had planned, and within ten minutes after the asylum-keeper retired he lighted a match at an upper window as a signal to Chick that he had so far succeeded in his plans.

Chick had been keeping watch upon the beach, at the very base of the cliffs below, and when he saw that tiny flame, for one brief second, in the window above his head, he breathed a prayer of thanksgiving, for he knew that Nick had been successful.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RESCUE FROM THE MAD-HOUSE.

Ten minutes later Chick stood upon the brink of the cliff, directly beneath the shadows of the mad-house, and here he waited and watched for the second signal from his chief which should inform him that Nick had found the girl.

Presently he started, for he fancied that he saw a dark shadow creep along the rocks toward him, and he realized that he was in a most dangerous position if he was discovered.

At his right, and not three feet away was a sheer descent of fifty feet to the jagged rocks which lined the shore of the Sound at the base of the almost perpendicular cliffs which formed the foundation upon which the mad-house stood.

He was standing close against the wall of the building, which rose dark and gloomy, many feet above his head.

There was only one way to escape from the point where he stood, and that was in the direction that he had seen the moving figure.

At first he fancied that his eyes might have deceived him, and that he had seen nothing to cause him alarm, but as he peered into the darkness, he became more than ever convinced that some one was creeping toward him along the very brink of the cliff.

He determined to wait and prepare himself for the moment when his adversary should spring upon him, and this he did.

Crouching upon the rocks, which, at this point, were rough and afforded but an imperfect foothold at the best, Chick remained as motionless as a portion of the cliff itself.

Once or twice he fancied that he saw the movement of a dark body close at hand, but he could not fully establish the fact in his mind that he was being approached by a desperate and blood-thirsty foe.

Yet such was indeed the case.

Crawling along the surface of the cliff, and less than ten feet from the spot where Chick was crouched against the mad-house wall, was the form of a man. In his hand he held a murderous-looking knife, while his lips were firmly compressed and his dark face bore a look which was savage in the extreme.

"Curses on him!" hissed the wretch, as he moved as silently as a shadow over the cold rocks. "If I can but get to him without being discovered, I will kill him in a second!"

But this villain, clever as he was, could not spring a surprise on so watchful a sentry as Chick.

Nearer and nearer he crept to the spot where the detective was awaiting him, and then he paused, seeming to calculate the distance which separated him from his prospective victim.

Slowly, silently his body rose, and he stood, half leaning against the wall of the asylum, when he felt a thrill of alarm, as a bright shaft of silvery light flashed upon him from out of the gloom, and he stood revealed, clutching in his right hand the murderous weapon with which he had hoped to take another's life.

"Put up your hands, my friend," came a stern voice from behind the light, and with

the words a revolver flashed before the wretched villain's eyes.

He started back with a cry, and the knife dropped from his nerveless grasp.

Instantly, however, he elevated his hands above his head.

"I cave," he exclaimed, as he cowered before the muzzle of the intrepid detective's six-shooter.

Chick was not long in placing the irons upon his man, and he quickly conducted him to the stable, where he made him fast to a post beneath the shed.

"You are the chap who has assisted this mad-house keeper in his miserable schemes," said Chick, as he made his prisoner secure.

"And you are the accursed detective who bound and gagged me at the station, where I was waiting to drive the man here," quickly responded the crook, gritting his teeth with a savage oath, as he spoke. "You will pay for this, and if you think that you are going to get into that building you are away off."

"Please do not get excited," sarcastically answered Chick, "but if you will just keep an eye on me I think that you will see me walk right into that door," and the detective pointed in the direction of the building which could scarcely be distinguished through the gloom.

Instantly the villain seemed to comprehend the meaning of Chick's words, for he turned and was about to shout when the detective's hand closed over his mouth.

"Not a lisp, or you are a dead man," cried Chick, and in a second a gag was forced between the man's teeth.

Helpless, as he now appeared, the wretch ground his heel into the earth, and, with an unspoken curse, submitted to the inevitable.

Presently Chick turned away, and true to the words which he had just spoken, he boldly approached the front of the building.

and tried the door by which Nick and the keeper had entered nearly half an hour previous.

To the reader it is plain that the villain who had appeared upon the scene was none other than the asylum-keeper's driver, whom Nick and Chick had surprised in the wagon at the depot, and whom the Little Giant had personated on the drive to the mad-house, while Chick was safely tucked away inside the vehicle.

It was now plain to Chick that they had failed to securely bind him in the few seconds in which the work had been done, and now he had appeared, unexpectedly enough, upon the scene.

But Chick had him secured this time, and when he turned toward the mad-house he felt that he could find his prisoner when he returned.

As Chick approached the door of the building a wild, piercing shriek rent the air.

It was in the high, shrill tones of a woman's voice, and the young detective realized that there was some trouble within the walls of the mad-house.

Bounding up the steps, he drew his pick-lock from his pocket and inserted it in the key-hole.

The bolt yielded to the pressure, and the door shot open, just as another ear-piercing shriek rang through the gloomy building.

Chick once more drew his bull's-eye from his pocket, and pressed the spring.

As the light flashed upon the scene, he discovered a flight of stairs leading to the second floor, and sprang toward them, when he suddenly stopped.

Crack! crack!

Two pistol shots rang out from above, and, as he looked, still another shot followed, while a cry came echoing down the stairway, in the same high-pitched tones that had previously reached his ears.

Chick hesitated no longer.

"That means business," he exclaimed, as he sprang up the stairs, two at a bound. "Nick is in trouble, and I will be just in time to aid him."

Drawing his revolver as he ran, the young detective reached the top of the first flight, where he paused and listened. Not a sound broke the silence of the hall, save the heavy breathing of the man who stood there, bull's-eye in hand, alert and motionless, ready to give up his life, if need be, to save that of his chief.

"Those sounds came from the third floor," he muttered, as he glanced at a second flight of stairs which led to the room above. "I am going up, anyhow, and will investigate," and suiting the action to the words, he ran swiftly but silently up the long flight of stairs.

At the top he paused. Two doors stood ajar, and through one of them a light threw its feeble rays into the hall.

There was a space of perhaps five inches between the edge of the door and the casing.

The sight which met Chick's eyes as he glanced within thrilled him with alarm.

Lying prone upon the floor was the form of a young and once beautiful woman, her long, tangled hair thrown in confusion over her head and shoulders, and close at hand lay the asylum-keeper weltering in a dark pool of blood.

The woman was silent and motionless, and Chick's first thought was that she had died by the bullet of her keeper's weapon.

From the center of the room a ladder led to the roof. Chick glanced upward, and saw that a scuttle was open at the top.

The floor of the prison-like cell was drenched with water, and upon the rounds of the ladder were the footprints of two persons who had climbed to the top of the building.

With a quick bound, Chick crossed the floor, for he knew that Nick was somewhere close at hand, and he determined to aid him if he was in need of assistance.

Up the ladder he sprang until his head was above the level of the roof, and then the sounds of a desperate struggle reached his ears, coming from a point some distance away, and near the edge of the roof above the cliffs.

Chick instantly pressed the spring of his dark lantern and threw the penetrating shaft of light in the direction of the sounds.

Then a sight was presented to his gaze which sent a thrill of horror through his body, for, poised upon the very brink of the roof, was the form of Nick Carter and his antagonist, engaged in the fearful struggle which bade fair to send both men to their doom upon the jagged rocks below.

The Little Giant was struggling in the grasp of a powerful man, whose eyes shone in the light of the bull's-eye like those of a maniac.

He was fully six feet tall, and he seemed a perfect giant in strength as he grasped Nick about the body, while the muscles stood out upon his arms and legs like whipcords, as he sought to hurl the detective over the edge to an awful fate.

They were fighting with the weapons which nature had provided, and it was plain that had not Nick been a perfect athlete, he could not have withstood the fearful strength of his foe.

But the detective had clutched his man by the hair of his head, and the other in turn was clinging to Nick's body with all the desperation of a maniac, for such, indeed, he was.

It seemed from the point where Chick stood that the two men must go over the brink in a thrice, and for a second he was almost at a loss just what was best to do.

He realized that such a fall meant sure death, and it was his object to save both Nick and his antagonist, if possible, but to save his chief's life at all hazards.

With a quick bound, he cleared the top of the scuttle, and a shout escaped his lips which was intended to give Nick courage until he could reach the spot.

It took but a second for him to cross the roof, and in another moment he was close to the spot where the two men were gripped in that deadly embrace.

The herculean form of the madman was bending and swaying as he sought to throw off the grip which Nick had fastened upon him.

Scarcely a foot separated them from the very edge. One quick stroke, one little slip, and the struggling combatants would have been hurled to their destruction; but fortune was once more with the great detective, for he felt the firm grasp of his assistant upon his arm, and then the two men were suddenly drawn toward the center of the roof, as Chick exerted all his strength in one powerful effort.

Another moment, and the madman dropped to the tin-covered roof beneath a stunning blow from Chick's hand.

The two detectives instantly secured him, and then Nick Carter grasped the hand of his faithful ally.

"You saved me that time, Chick," he said. "That man has the strength of an ox. But come, we must get out of here, for no one knows how many more of that kind may be let loose upon us."

They lifted the form of the unresisting maniac from the roof, and bore it to the foot of the ladder, where still lay the unconscious girl.

"She will be all right now," spoke Nick, as he saw his assistant cast an anxious glance toward the silent form of the young

woman upon the floor. "She has fainted from exhaustion, and we must get her away from here before she recovers."

They examined the wound of the wretched asylum-keeper and found that, although dangerous, it was not necessarily fatal, and in a short time they had borne the fainting trio from the building.

Chick was not long in hitching up a team, and with their prisoners and the victim of the murderous plot, they were soon upon their way to the station.

"If we don't lose the two birds in the city, we will have wiped out a bad gang," said Nick, as they bowled along the road toward the depot, and Chick replied with a nod of assent.

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK'S THRILLING ADVENTURE.

Nick and Chick, with the rescued girl, and the trio of manacled prisoners, reached the station in time to flag a train for New York—the last that passed up the road at night.

Miss Babson was made as comfortable as possible on a sort of couch formed by laying one of the cushions across from one seat to the next in front.

Scarcely had the train started when she sank into slumber, and she did not awaken during the ride.

The prisoners on the other side of the car were too firmly secured to give any trouble. Thus the two friends had leisure for reviewing the events of the evening.

"How did you find her in the mad-house?" asked Chick.

"I entered the house with that infernal old rascal," said Nick, pointing to the keeper of the asylum. "We had arranged to spend the night watching for any signs of the approach of the authorities, and I took my turn first. I was to watch until two

o'clock, when I was to wake him and he was to relieve me.

"He went with me to the room which was occupied by the young woman. I was to watch outside her door, which was a little way open. After he had gone I signaled you that I was safely in the house.

"For a long time Miss Babson stood at the window looking out through the heavy bars toward the Sound, and moaning in an undertone all the while.

"Then I saw something which caused me to shudder. As I peered through the narrow opening in her door I discovered that she had removed the bars which crossed her window, and a moment later she sprang upon the narrow window ledge as if she was about to throw herself down to the jagged boulders below.

"What could I do? In my hand I held the bucket of cold water with which I purposed to deluge her when the proper moment should come, and now she had placed herself in a position where to attempt to aid her would seem almost suicidal.

"Nevertheless, I made up my mind that there was but one way in which to settle the matter, and cautiously opening the door, I stepped inside the room.

"The light was so dim that I could scarcely see her, as she was perched there upon the window ledge, ready to spring away from me at the first warning, but I determined to succeed.

"I was about half way across the room when she turned and saw me approaching.

"With a wild scream, she threw up her hand, and at the same instant I dashed the pailful of water squarely into her face.

"Instantly I was by her side. Her body was already half way out of the window, and yet she seemed to cling to the sill with a certain intuitive sense that she was in danger, but that rescue was close at hand. I

seized her skirt and drew her into the room, and just as I was about to speak, I saw her body collapse, and I knew that she had fainted.

"Then I turned toward the door, when I made a discovery which put matters in an altogether new light.

"The heavy door was hung upon spring hinges, and it had closed behind me immediately after I had entered.

"It was locked upon the outside, and I was a helpless prisoner in the cell of the mad-house. I drew my revolver from my pocket and resolved to signal to you by a shot from the window, when, chancing to look up, I saw a ladder which was hinged at one end beneath a scuttle that led to the roof.

"As the other end was held in place by a hook, I soon released it, and mounted to the trap-door, thinking that I would get out upon the roof and let you know how I was situated.

"Just as I had raised the trap I glanced back, and I saw that the cell door was being opened.

"Then I realized that I had been discovered. Upon the threshold stood the villain who had so long been the keeper of the unfortunate girl, and by his side was another, whom I knew at the first glance to be a madman.

"His eyes were upon me, and without a moment's warning the asylum keeper raised his hand and fired at me as I stood upon the ladder, half way up.

"I answered his shot with one from my own weapon, and I saw him reel and plunge forward almost to the spot where Lillian Babson still lay unconscious upon the floor.

"With a demonical yell, the madman hurled his huge form across the narrow cell, and his gleaming eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire as he grasped the ladder beneath my feet.

"I felt the ladder sway and twist beneath me, and I feared that our combined weights upon it might bring us both to the floor.

"I knew that you were not far away, and although I was twice tempted to shoot at the man, as he sprang toward me, yet I forbore, because I had no wish to harm him.

"I sprang to the roof, but not a foot ahead of the maniac. His huge form rose from the scuttle, with one terrible bound, and then he grappled me.

"I have engaged with some powerful men, but I believe that he was the hardest customer I ever met. Anyhow, it came out all right, thanks to you, Chick, and if everything goes right, we will have our game all caged within a few hours."

"It was a close call," answered Chick.

Then he related his experience with the man whom he had so cleverly captured.

The train at last rolled into the station in Long Island City. Here the party separated.

Chick took the prisoners in a closed carriage and crossed to New York by the ferry.

Nick and Miss Babson, in another carriage, went to the house of the physician who had taken charge of the young man whom Nick had saved from the devouring flames of the crematory.

The girl was greatly refreshed by her brief but sound slumber. She was naturally robust, and possessed unusual mental power; and she recovered very rapidly from even so terrible an experience.

Nick was satisfied that she could pass through one more ordeal safely.

When they reached their destination, and had been ushered into the house, Nick left Miss Babson in the waiting-room and went at once to the old physician's office, which was just beyond. The two rooms were divided by folding doors, but Nick did not enter that way, for he knew that the patient

was in the office, and he did not wish Miss Babson to see him too soon.

The doctor greeted Nick warmly.

"Our patient is much improved," he said.

Indeed, that was evident, for the young man's appearance showed it. His eyes were brighter, and his posture, as he sat in his chair, was more indicative of returning strength and self-control than Nick could have hoped.

"His mind is still clouded," the doctor whispered to Nick; "but it would not require much to relieve him from what remains of the hypnotic influence. Some sudden shock of old association, as——"

"Come in, Miss Babson," cried Nick, throwing back the folding door.

Both the doctor and his patient leaped up with surprise.

The girl bore the shock well. Some words of Nick's had partly prepared her, and when she saw her brother she knew in an instant that in herself lay his hope.

The young man passed his hand across his eyes, as one who wakes, startled, from a deep sleep.

Then he cried:

"Lilly! dear little sister!" and almost fell into her arms.

"It is done," said the doctor, grasping the detective's hand warmly. "The spell is broken. He has regained the full control of his faculties."

CHAPTER IX.

A SHREWD GAME BLOCKED.

When the brother and sister had exchanged their affectionate greetings, they turned to Nick, and overwhelmed him with thanks for their deliverance.

"You can thank me best," said the detective, "by telling me all you know about this man who pretends to be your uncle."

Lillian, whose memory was clearer than her brother's, told the story.

They had heard, some years before, that their uncle had died of fever in the mining camps of Australia. When he appeared so suddenly in New York, they were amazed, but never doubted his identity.

He had a plausible story, and he was well primed with the facts of their uncle's life. As neither of them remembered Hosmer Babson's personal appearance, the trick was comparatively easy.

Soon the newcomer became a power in their household. Walter fell under his sway at once, but the girl felt a repulsion for him which resisted all his wiles, and his undoubtedly marvelous hypnotic power.

Walter spent hours in his supposed uncle's room. He seemed to have lost all other interest in life except that inspired by this man's presence and mysterious conversation.

The young man had become nervous and pale. A strange illness seemed to be sapping his vitality.

His sister blamed him for spending so much time indoors, and for neglecting his former healthful exercises. She had no idea of the dreadful plot which was developing under that roof.

Yet she continued to fear and dislike her uncle, so that he could get no power over her. This unquestionably drove him to the use of drugs for her, while with her brother pure hypnotism was enough.

The end of this deplorable business the reader already knows.

When Nick had heard all, he took the brother and sister to his house.

There was a message awaiting the detective. It was from Chick, who, after leaving his prisoners at headquarters had gone at once to the house in Fifty-eighth street.

This was the message:

"The birds have flown. I don't think they have left the city yet, for they haven't

been out of the house an hour. I am working European steamships. Cover the Brazilian liner sailing to-morrow. I shall not be able to get around to her. CHICK."

Scarcely had Nick finished reading this when another report came. This one was from Patsy, who had been working another branch of the case.

The nature of his work will be clear to one who reads his message, which ran as follows:

"They've cleaned up everything. By hypnotism the bogus uncle got Walter to put property under his control. The villain has sold right and left wherever he dared, and the woman has been in it, too.

"Between them they've disposed of nearly all that was immediately salable. They've cleared about three hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars, and are getting away with it in cash. PATSY."

So Nick had cleared up one case only to get into another. He had thwarted the murder of Walter Babson and the still more infamous crime against his sister, and there still remained this gigantic robbery which had been successfully worked, so that no obstacle but the perils of flight stood in the way of the criminals.

Nick instantly left the house and hurried down to the cable office, where he did what little was possible to do to hurry up the reply to his cable to Australia.

It came about sunrise, and, except that it was condensed, as all cable messages are, it ran thus:

"The man personating Hosmer Babson is Lemuel Morello, suspected of murdering Babson, but convicted of another crime, and sent to the chain gang.

"He escaped over a year ago, and was supposed to have fled to England.

"He is accompanied by one of the shrewd-

est female crooks ever seen in Australia. Her real name is not known here. She has a hundred aliases.

"If arrested, I want them both sent back here."

This was signed by the chief of police of Sydney. A second message gave brief descriptions of the two criminals, which fitted exactly. It also contained a hint which strengthened Chick's suggestion that the two would flee to Brazil,

The South American liner sailed at eight o'clock.

It was after seven before Nick had read his Australian cables, but it required only a short time to get to the steamer's pier.

The captain stood at the head of the gangplank as Nick hurried up.

In response to the detective's question regarding the criminals the captain said:

"They must be the two just arrested on the pier. Your descriptions tally exactly. They were caught just as they stepped out of their carirage. I was told that it was one of Nick Carter's men who did it."

"Can Chick have got ahead of me?" said Nick.

The captain laughed.

"I guess he has," he said. "The pupil has outdone the master this time."

Nick turned to descend the gangplank. Then he said, suddenly:

"Did you see the arrest?"

"No; but I was told about it. It's all right. I say, Mr. Carter, don't keep me here any longer than you can help. I'm all ready to pull out of the dock this moment."

"I must verify your story," said the detective. "Of course, I know you're all right, but——"

"Why, there's my informant now!" cried the captain.

He pointed to a tall man who was backing out of a passage way leading from the forward part of the boat. His motions were peculiar, and were not understood by Nick until he saw that a half-dozen sailors were carrying an enormous sea-chest through the passage, and that there was no room to get by it. They had swept the man out.

"I beg your pardon, sir," the captain called. "Didn't you tell me about an arrest on the pier?"

"Why, yes," said the man, coming forward; "a man and a woman."

The next instant the surprised captain saw Nick—who had stepped back out of sight—suddenly leap forward and slip a pair of handcuffs to the wrists of the passenger.

"One of the shrewdest games I ever heard of," said the detective. "That story, I don't mind telling you, very nearly threw me off the track. It was so bold, so simple, and so natural."

"This man, captain, is the criminal I was looking for. He told you that story fearing that I would come for him here."

"It was a great trick, but I have my man now. I'm obliged to those sailors who crowded him out of that passage."

The detective turned to the prisoner and snatched a false beard off his face.

"Lemuel Morello, the chain gang is waiting for you," he said.

A search of the vessel revealed the woman, and both were taken to headquarters.

That night, in his cell, by a dim lantern's light, Lemuel Morello was writing upon a

scrap of paper while his special guard seemed to be dozing in a corner.

"Nick Carter," the note read, "you're a shrewd man—a hard man to beat—but you're not good enough to send me back to the chain gang. Oh, no; I have a little remedy for misfortunes like this."

"The next time you catch a prisoner, examine his teeth. If you had done that to me, you would have found a little capsule of enamel full of prussic acid in a cavity in one of them."

"I have but to open my mouth wide, snap my teeth together hard, and the chain gang will be no more to me than to the most innocent babe in this city."

"If I had not this means of defeating you, I tell you frankly that I would confess the murder of Hosmer Babson and hang for it, rather than go to the chain gang."

"But that is not necessary. I have an easier death to die. In one second it will be over. Good-by."

The pen dropped from the villain's hand. Cold sweat was on his forehead. His eyes rolled wildly.

A tremor passed over his frame. Then slowly his iron jaws parted widely.

He hesitated an instant; then the jaws came together, with a ferocious snap.

They met on a large piece of wood.

Morello, with a stifled oath, leaped up, striving to grapple with Nick Carter, who was holding the wood in his mouth.

The guard instantly came to Nick's assistance. The ruffian was bound fast.

And still his jaws had not met; the wood separated them.

"Excuse me for interrupting you," said

Nick. "It was impolite for me to creep up behind you and see what you were writing, but as there happened to be a secret door in that side of the cell, I thought I'd try it.

"And now I'll perform a small job of dentistry for you. Open your mouth wide. There! The capsule is in my hand, unbroken.

"Now, Lemuel Morello, take your choice between the chain gang and the gallows, for they are all that remain."

On more mature consideration, Morello chose the chain gang, but the Australian authorities had different views, and sent him to the gallows.

The woman was sentenced to a long term in prison.

Turning from these gloomy views of crime to brighter pictures, it should be said that the Babsons recovered nearly all that Morello had stolen, and bid fair to have happy lives with the wealth which cost them so much suffering.

Their gratitude to Nick is unbounded, and at their oft-repeated invitation he is sometimes a guest in their handsome residence, where he is always overwhelmed with thanks and praise.

THE END.

The next number will contain "The Mystery of the Yellow Cab; or, A Little Set-Back for Chick."

Nick Carter Weekly

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 206—The Doctor's Dangerous Experiment; or, Nick Carter's Flying Trip to New Orleans.
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